

Teaching Candidate: Jennifer Johnson
Host Teacher: Marla Moore
School: Prairie Central Chenoa Elementary
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Community Factors

The school where I completed my Demonstration Teaching was located in Chenoa, Illinois. It was a quiet community located just off Route 55, directly North of Bloomington-Normal.

One environmental factor that characterized this community was that the total town population was roughly 1,845 people taken in the 2000 Census (Wikipedia, 2007). It was a very small and close-knit community, which had a major influence on the school. Everyone seemed to know everyone else, and there was a high expectation for all teachers.

A second environmental factor of this community was that the dominant race was Caucasian with about 97.72% of the people being white (Wikipedia, 2007). The second closest race came in at 2.6% and was Hispanic/Latino. This was very reflective in the school enrollment as well. This had an effect on the diversity of the school, and the cultures that students were taught about.

A third characteristic of this community was that the median household income was about \$44,420 (Wikipedia, 2007). Household income helps determine how much financial support the community was able to provide to the school. As well as, determining what educational resources were available for students at home.

A fourth environmental factor was that this community was situated in Central Illinois and was based in an agriculturally productive area. Many members of the community were farmers, while others travel about 30 minutes to the nearest city to pursue employment there.

A final environmental factor was the support of education given by the members of this community. A majority of the members of the community were very supportive of having a good education for their children, and helped provide this by participating in elections, volunteering, and providing financial support for the school.

District Factors

One environmental factor of the district was that it was a consolidated school district comprised of seven towns. There were four elementary schools in the district each located in different towns. Within the last five years, Chenoa, the town where I completed my Demonstration Teaching, was added to the district. The district was very spread out, and having the different elementary schools made the transition to the Prairie Central Upper Elementary difficult for some students. When they had spent the first four years of their schooling with the same kids, it was a culture shock for them to have students from different

towns in their class when they reach fifth grade.

A second environmental factor was that the entire district population was made up of predominantly Caucasian people. Again, this could be seen in the enrollment of children at the schools who were also this race. Within the district, 93.8% of people were Caucasian, 3.3% were Hispanic/Latino, 1.2 % Multi-Racial, and finally, 1% of the district population was African American (Illinois School Report Card, 2007).

A third environmental factor of the district was that the total enrollment of the schools was about 2,199 students (Illinois School Report Card, 2007). This determined what type of funding was available to the schools from the government, as well as how many teachers and other support staff could be employed.

A fourth environmental factor in the district was that the political party of choice was Republican. Most of the district was located in Livingston County, which was known as a Republican County.

A fifth environmental factor in the district was the education levels of the teachers. The Illinois School Report Card for 2007 stated that 48.3% of the teachers in the district had a Bachelors Degree and 51.7% of the teachers had a Masters Degree or above. The level of education of the teachers affects how well the students will be taught in the classroom. This district, especially, had teachers who were very well qualified for a position in the classroom.

This could mean a great deal to the town in several ways. First of all, the students were getting a high-quality education even though they may come from families who do not have much income. Secondly, these teachers were most likely receiving a good income from the school district, which could lead to an increase in revenue for the town. Having over half the teachers in the district with Masters or above was an excellent resource for this community.

School Factors

One environmental factor affecting the school was that it only housed Pre-K through fourth grade classes. Ample space was available in this school for the teachers to use without feeling crowded by other teachers and classes.

A second environmental factor was that the school had a total enrollment of 170 students (Illinois School Report Card, 2007). The enrollment of the school was lower, and thus, the teachers had smaller class sizes for easier instructing.

A third environmental factor was that 99% of the students in this school were Caucasian. This was evident in the classrooms as the students had less opportunity to learn about other cultures firsthand. Instead, they learned about other cultures in the classroom relying solely on their teacher for information to prepare them for when they met people of different cultures.

A fourth environmental factor of the school was that 54.1% of the school was considered low income (Illinois School Report Card, 2007). Low income in the families could be seen through several areas in the school. There were a majority of students in the school who

received free lunches because of low-income households. When field trips were planned, there were students who relied on the school to provide them money in order to attend. Low-income households also limited the type of “learning environment” that students had at home. For example, several students in our class do not have computers or access to resources such as this available in their homes.

A final environmental factor of this school was that 100% of the teachers were Caucasian. The school community was less diverse and required the teachers to make up for this by spending more time in the classroom teaching about other cultures.

Classroom Factors

Physical features

The classroom that I worked in was actually very large in size compared to some of the other rooms in the school. This was great because there was a lot more room for centers and specified areas such as a reading corner. Likewise, it was much nicer to have room to walk around when instructing rather than being confined to one spot. The classroom had a large dry erase board, and also a chalkboard. The dry erase board was very good for providing visuals during lessons, and we used the chalkboard to do display our “word wall” words for student reference when writing. The room also had several bulletin boards and areas that were designated for the presentation of student work. These were great for hanging student projects for others to see, and boosting the students’ self-confidence. Also, the room had very good lighting. I know this may seem trivial, but it makes the classroom feel very bright. It was also easier for the students to read and work on their assignments. All in all, physically, the classroom was very well furnished and a good size which allowed for a great learning environment for the students.

Availability of technology equipment and resources

Technology equipment and resources were readily available in the school, but not necessarily in each classroom. Each classroom had two computers for student use that were mostly used for the students to take their Accelerated Reader tests. This was helpful because the students did not have to leave the classroom to take their tests. Our classroom also had a T.V. in it, which could be utilized for instructional purposes. We did not use it a lot, but it was nice to have when we had a video that was included in a lesson or unit. The room also had an overhead projector that was a great tool to have for instruction. Using the overhead for instruction was a great way to add variety to my lesson format. My host teacher had a school provided computer and a printer of her own in the classroom. This was helpful to print off worksheets or lesson plans because this could be done during class time when students were working quietly at their desks. Finally, the school had four Smart Boards

available for teacher use in their classroom. Smart Boards are a combination of a computer, an interactive whiteboard, and a projector. They could make any lesson look professional, and were so easy to use. Having the Smart Boards available was a huge asset for the classroom, and they were one of the many types of equipment that could be used in instruction.

Extent of Parental Involvement

The parental involvement in this particular classroom was relatively high. My host teacher commented that this was the first year that she had had 100% response for the parent-teacher conferences. The lines of communication were very open between the teacher and the parents. She was constantly e-mailing, sending notes, receiving notes, and talking on the phone to parents of the students. She had a great response to parent volunteering on field trips and for any other help she may have needed in the classroom. A majority of the parents were extremely helpful and willing to do what they could to enhance their child's education. I know this is not always typical when it comes to parental involvement, but it was nice to know that there were still parents out there who were involved with and desired for their children to receive the best education they could.